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ABSTRACT

A college professor of English involved with the HELDS project, Higher Education for Learning Disabled Students, describes his own reluctance in accommodating learning disabled students in his classroom. He mentions his discovery that some students have difficulty in dealing with conventional print in textbooks, and that typographic changes and use of a tinted overlay sheet can reduce print distortions. Techniques are described which allow students to use other learning modalities, and the importance of a detailed syllabus for allowing students to plan their time in advance is stressed. He notes that once professors realize that the unique needs of learning disabled students legitimize the need for adaptations, the professors' reluctance will dissipate. He also cites the value of willingness to try alternative approaches and time schedules to allow learning disabled students to perform at their best. Appended are a list of characteristics of adults with learning disabilities and a sample course syllabus and class log. (CL)

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A COLLEGE PROFESSOR AS A RELUCTANT LEARNER: FACING UP TO THE LEARNING DISABLED

by
John Herum

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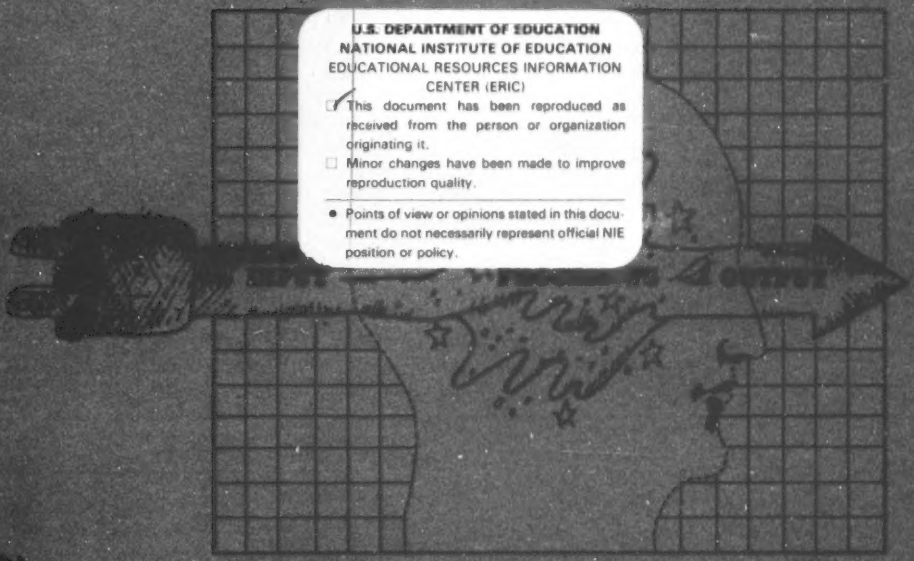

THE HELDS PROJECT SERIES
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

2

EC 160 114

A COLLEGE PROFESSOR AS A RELUCTANT LEARNER: FACING UP TO THE LEARNING DISABLED

Alternative Techniques for Teaching English Composition to Learning Disabled Students in the University

by
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HELDS Project
(Higher Education for
Learning Disabled Students)

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THE HELDS PROJECT AT CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

The acronym HELDS stands for Higher Education for Learning Disabled Students. It represents a model program funded for three years (1980-1983) by the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), a division of the Department of Education. This project was funded as a model for other colleges and universities that are preparing to provide equal academic access for the learning disabled students.

Project HELDS had three major focuses. The first was to provide such access for the learning disabled student under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This we did for learning disabled students, most of whom were admitted without modified requirements to Central Washington University. These students were not provided remedial classes. They were enrolled in classes with other college students. The help that we gave was habilitative, rather than remedial, teaching them how to compensate for their weaknesses.

The habilitative training began with identification of those who were learning disabled and included, but was not limited to, such support services as taped textbooks (provided through the services of our Handicapped Student Services Coordinator), readers, writers for tests, extended time for tests, pre-registration with advising to ensure a balanced schedule, the teaching of study skills and tutoring by tutors from the campus-wide tutoring program who were especially trained to tutor learning disabled students.

The second focus of the project was to give a core of twenty faculty teaching classes in the basic and breadth areas a sensitivity to the characteristics of students who were learning disabled so that they could modify their teaching techniques to include the use of more than one modality. This ensured an academic environment conducive to learning for the LD. The faculty members participated in monthly sessions which featured experts in the field of learning disabilities, and in the area of the law (Section 504) that deals with the handicapped student and higher education. There were several sessions in which Central Washington University graduates and currently enrolled LD students shared their viewpoints and experiences with the faculty members. As a result of this some faculty members used the students as resource people in developing curricula for their various disciplines published in this series.

The third focus of the project was to make the university community aware of the characteristics of learning disabilities and of the program at Central. It also sought to encourage other colleges and universities to initiate such programs.

WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT?

People with learning disabilities have handicaps that are invisible. Their disability is made up of multiple symptoms that have been with them since childhood. Many of them have been described as "dyslexics," but if they are categorized as dyslexic, this will be only one of their many symptoms, as a sore throat is only one of the many symptoms of a cold.

Three concise descriptions of the learning disabled children are provided in Hallahan and Kauffman:

"The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (1968) proposed the following definition, which was adopted by the 91st Congress:

> Children with special disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage.

Task Force II of a national project (Minimal Brain Dysfunction in Children: Educational, Medical and Health Related Services, Phase Two of a Three-Phase Project, 1969) wrote the following two definitions:

> Children with learning disabilities are those (1) who have educationally significant discrepancies among their sensory-motor, perceptual, cognitive, academic, or related developmental levels which interfere with the performance of educational tasks; (2) who may or may not show demonstrable deviation in central nervous system functioning; and (3) whose disabilities are not secondary to general mental retardation, sensory deprivation or serious emotional disturbance.
>
> Children with learning disabilities are those (1) who manifest an educationally significant discrepancy between estimated academic potential and actual level of academic potential and actual level of academic functioning as related to dysfunctioning in the learning process; (2) who may or may not show

demonstrable deviation in central nervous system functioning; and (3) whose disabilities are not secondary to general mental retardation, cultural, sensory and/or educational deprivation or environmentally produced serious emotional disturbance.[1]

Although the preceding definitions are concerned with children, the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, in their booklet *Learning Disability: Not just a Problem Children Outgrow*, discusses LD adults who have the same symptoms they had as children. The Department of Education (Reference Hallahan & Kauffman) says that two to three percent of the total public school population are identified as learning disabled and that there are over fifteen million unidentified LD adults in the United States, acknowledging, of course, that people with this problem are not restricted to the United States but are found all over the world.

We know that many learning disabled persons have average or above average intelligence and we know that many of these are gifted. In their company are such famous gifted people as Nelson Rockefeller, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Hans Christian Anderson, Auguste Rodin, William Butler Yeats, and Gustave Flaubert.

The causes of learning disabilities are not known, but in our project each of our identified learning disabled students shows either an unusual pregnancy (trauma at birth, such as delayed delivery, prolonged or difficult delivery) or premature birth. They oftentimes have a genetic family history of similar learning disability problems.

An exerpt from my *Criterion and Behavioral Checklist for Adults With Specific Learning Disabilities* has been included as Appendix A.

/s/ MCS
6 June 1982
Ellensburg, Washington

[1]Daniel P. Hallahan and James M. Kauffman *Exceptional Children* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978), pp. 121-122.

I. INTRODUCTION

It was in San Diego, in 1974, at a convention luncheon. The speaker was James Britton, author of *Language and Learning* and recently retired from the University of London. He was describing a major product of contemporary Western culture: students who are turned off. They come from all social classes; he categorized them as "reluctant learners." An apt phrase, I thought, little suspecting that seven years later, I was to become one.

I was flattered when asked to join the HELDS project, for I was told that students, among others, had suggested me; but I was suspicious, too. From my limited awareness of learning disabilities, it seemed to me that here were students who had major problems reading and writing, yet we were supposed to "accommodate" them. "Accommodate?" I suspected another assault on literacy.

Right from the start, Myrtle Clyde-Snyder, director of the HELDS project, faced up to these suspicions, as later the suspicious had to face up to their own unawareness. "Accommodate," she insisted, "does not mean lowering your standards. No one is helped by doing that."

As the project progressed what "accommodate" meant became clear. To begin with, it meant acknowledging that there are students intellectually capable of higher education, but whose perceptual capacities malfunction badly enough to impose a serious burden on their efforts to learn. It meant becoming aware of the support services developed to help these students accept and manage the extra work their burden imposes. And it meant facing squarely the fact that certain teaching habits and perhaps certain professorial attitudes increased these students' burden needlessly.

One such attitude sufaced early: an irrational taboo against students composing orally. Just as busy managers learn to dictate correspondence to get their work done efficiently; so, too, some students have found that dictating a report of an essay examination is the best way to demonstrate what they have learned. For students with certain disabilities, whether perceptual or motor, dictating may be the only way.

Such students are well within their rights to ask to dictate, say, examination answers. The dictation, of course, must be transcribed; and transcription services are among the support services a learning center might reasonably offer. If there is no support service of this kind, a student might decide to buy secretarial services. It was at this point that some professors had qualms. If the student hires or otherwise contracts someone else to do the transcription, is the resulting draft still the student's own work? Hasn't it somehow been contaminated? Don't those secretaries help clean up the errors?

As the discussion evolved it seemed a classic instance of some teachers confusing means with ends. Oral composition is standard in any busy office. If a student can afford the cost of transcribing, I would en-

courage the use of dictating equipment, just as I would the use of word-processing equipment, and I would do so for the same reasons an office manager would do so: it saves time and produces a better final copy. There are some observers of these matters who firmly believe dictating improves an author's sense of structure because to keep up with the machine one must think farther ahead to what will come next than one must with a pen or typewriter. Other observers see no difference. Nobody, as far as I know, has any evidence that dictation lowers the quality of the finished product.

Students who dictate their compositions are still responsible for the proofreading and all the conventions. I had a learning disabled student last year. His disability (a form of dysgraphia) made written composition impossible. He had to dictate. He quickly found out that no matter who transcribed his drafts, he was solely responsible for them. (He had to do some drilling on *it's* and *its*.) In short, to permit a student to do something in school that is standard procedure in business and government seems less of a matter of accommodation than a lesson in how things are really done these days. Moreover, for those with access to transcription services and word-processing equipment (I have received essays written on a computer), the standards on conventions can become highly intolerant. The final copy ought to be nearly impeccable. Standards are thus heightened, not lowered.

That discussion, along with other similar ones, reassured me. Accommodating did not mean lowering standards, but it might mean accepting alternate ways of getting a job done.

As the project continued, then, accommodating the learning disabled meant looking hard at our teaching habits and our attitudes to see which helped and which didn't, and what to do about it. All the other accommodations — acknowledging the existence of the learning disabled, identifying legitimate support services, recognizing habits and attitudes that added needless burdens to the already burdened — led up to one last general accommodation: doing something about it. Finally, then, accommodating meant that good teachers were being asked to be even better. At no point were standards in jeopardy.

My suspicions gradually subsided, but my reluctances remained. I had trouble with the very first accommodation, for I was reluctant to admit the validity of the term "learning disabled."

II. MY FIRST RELUCTANCE

Perhaps I had been too easily impressed with the 40-page invective "The Invention of a Disease" by Peter Schrag and Diane Divoky in their book *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child*. In their anger about proposed mass testing for "predelinquency" and anger about the use of drugs to

quiet children, Schrag and Divoky also blasted the concept of learning disabilities. They seemed to confirm my impression that it was just one more label used to let the schools and the teachers off the hook.

Similarly, I was reluctant to accept the concept of "dyslexia." It, too, impressed me as a concept so ill-conceived as to be formless, without clear meaning, used less to reveal learning that was disabled than to mask teaching that was incompetent. The irony of my stance was that I thought I was a champion of the kids and their parents.

But what can one do when the evidence mounts, and it points clearly to perceptual difficulties? My own suspicions had been fed by the anger of Shrag and Divoky. Given the concerns they had, their anger was not always unwarranted, but the suspicions and anger had left me facing clear evidence unprepared to accept it. Let me use a whimsical example, rather than an angry one, to describe my position.

Suppose I had been insisting that koala bears did not exist, that they were the invention of greedy toy manufacturers. The claim would be plausible because Koala bears are not very common where I live. Like the learning disabled, there aren't a lot of them; so few, in fact, that I could plausibly claim there weren't any at all.

Meanwhile, some friends had been telling me that koalas do exist and that they aren't really bears and so shouldn't be called "koala *bears*," but just "koalas." To them I would respond, "What difference does it make? They don't exist."

Then one day a koala walks in, intent on demonstrating to me his existence — no fake, no mask, no costume, not really a bear, but pure koala. I would have to admit to my friends that I had been wrong and that maybe I had been too reluctant to learn.

I could not cure anybody's learning disability; but I could cure my reluctance. All I had to do was open my eyes, my ears, and my mind.

I listened to students describe how, for them, print seemed to float waving in space, horribly difficult to track. Shortly after hearing students describe wayward print, I read an article "Figure/ground, Brightness Contrast, and Reading Disabilities," by Olive Mears, who works in a reading clinic in Auckland. It told about exasperated children in New Zealand who wondered why the book covers were easier to read than the pages inside. Mears elicited the following response from Robyn, a non-reader of superior intelligence:

> Oh it's silly! It's not fair! They make the covers so you can read them, and then you want to read the book and you can't because it's all black and white and glaring. They know it gives you a headache but they don't care. People who design posters are clever. They want you to read what they say, so they print it so you *can* read it. But people know kids have got to read books at school, so they don't bother about the print — just for the cover. They make that good. It's not fair.
>
> (Mears, p. 16.)

When Mears asked Robyn to show her a book with a good cover, "Robyn indicated a book which had an off-white title on a mottled grey-blue background."

Mears asked. "How would you print books, Robyn?"

> "I'd have light, bright colours on a dark base. People like bright colours and light colours because you *have* to look. There shouldn't be any black and white together."

"Why not?"

> "Because white glares at you and gives you a headache, and it makes your eyes water so you shouldn't have it. And you can't see black letters clearly so you shouldn't have them."
> (Mears, p. 16.)

Mears is convinced, after working with children in the clinic, "that blurring, moving, jumping, flickering print distortions are indeed a visual reality for many children. Their comments suggest that this is not the result of a vision defect, but rather it is due to perceptual instability stemming from and induced by the conventional figure/ground organization of books...." (Mears, p.14) Conventionally, books in general and textbooks in particular print black on white with a high contrast. High contrast black on white caused Robyn her troubles. "You can't see black letters clearly...." The phenomenon of black letters that are hard to see, that, indeed, thin out and disappear can be experienced by any person with normal sight, under certain conditions: for example, a road sign at night.

Mears corresponded with a member of the New Zealand Road Sign Committee, who told her that "road signs had to be light on dark because black symbols would thin down; 'In fact, they can disappear.'" (Mears, p. 18) Perceptually, a white area adjacent to a black will encroach on the black. It is a perceptual phenomenon called "irradiation." This phenomenon makes traditional typefaces with their serifs easier to read than the more contemporary-looking sans-serif: "The serifs are the barriers which stem the encroachment of the white, maintain clarity of outline, and prevent thinning of letters." (Mears, p. 18) But at night, irradiation is strengthened, the white encroaches on the black, the black thins and vanishes.

Mears believes that for some children the irradiation effect is extreme all the time. Something that is a night phenomenon for everyone is for them an everyday problem. To alleviate the effect, Mears had the children put a tinted perspex sheet over the page. It reduced the contrast. The letters settled down. While older people would use sunglasses, the children rejected them, but only one child explained why: "Anyway, I'd

never use sunglasses. Everybody would think there's something wrong with me. When I use the coloured perspex, you can tell it's the book that's wrong." (Mears, p. 29)

This "hyper-irradiation" is only one kind of dyslexia and dyslexia is only one kind of learning disability. There are many others and much that isn't known yet. However, by listening to the testimony of those who had experienced wayward print and by reading about the experiences of those who have tried to help, I became increasingly aware of how strenuous, and how distressing, reading could be for some people. So, then, I acknowledged one of the problems, but how could I help?

To help those who have reading problems, the HELDS project teaches them the importance of skimming to get an overview. It happened that as I was learning about the burdens that print imposes on some, I was also working on a textbook. To help me set up the format for my textbook I was studying the research reported in *Visible Language* by Dirk Wendt: "An Experimental Approach to the Improvement of the Typographic Design of Textbooks." Wendt described experiments that proposed a format that, in effect, makes skimming easier, much easier. It is called "visualizing the information." As designed by two typographers from Hamburg, Dierk Becker and Jorg Heinrich, it is a 2-page, 4-column layout. Basic information goes in column one, explanations in column two, ancillary material in column four. Figures go in either column three or four depending on whether they match the explanation or the ancillary material.

I have not used the full 4-column format, but I did try a 2-column one arranged so a student could read down the left-hand column to get an overview before before going into details. Here is the text before revision:

> The propectus should answer the kind of questions an editor would ask, such as:
>
> > What is the angle you have in mind? With what material do you intend to work? How competent are you? Why are you interested? Who are the experts in the field and how well do you know their work? What readers would be interested in such a study, and why? (Herum and Cummings, pp. 18-19)

On the next page is the revision that attempts to "visualize the information" in a way that makes getting an overview easier.

Parts List For The Propsectus

(1) SUBJECT	Introduce the subject and the issues or problems you intend to center on. Explain why you are interested, your degree of expertness, and your special angle.
(2) SOURCES	If you will be able to draw upon your own experiences, start with them. The first two parts will then be firmly interlocked. Introduce your "starter text" and give a complete reference to it. Offer evidence of its reliability.
(3) WORKING CONDITIONS	Specify your "prime time," and explain why it is prime and how much of it will be devoted to this work. Describe where you will be working on this job and explain why it is a good place for you to work.
(4) DEADLINES	Specify when you will turn in the first draft of each of your three compositions. Remember to give me time to see them *before* you do your final revisions. Specify when the revisions will be turned in.
(5) GOALS	Start with a brief reminder of what working on the subject will do for you; then describe which particular facet of the craft of writing you intend to get better at this quarter.

The lessons I learned in overcoming my first reluctance were mostly things I had known. They were nothing new, but they were helpful reminders: Be explicit. Be graphic. Summarize frequently and help the students summarize. The new lesson was one of awareness. For some reason, the most help came from the Mears article with its story of Robyn and the irradiated road sign.

The Mears article taught me that under certain conditions all of us experience the problems faced by the learning disabled. Most of their problems — confusions about sequences, lapses in recall, spinning one's wheels in fruitless repetitive behavior, and many of the other problems — are problems that a normal person experiences, too, but only sporadically. The learning disabled must face their particular set of problems oftener — daily, hourly, unrelentingly. It is like stuttering. Everyone has moments of non-fluency, but for some the moments come too often. To overcome my reluctances, I seemed to need that sense of identity with the disabled, that sense of being able to say "Oh yes, I am beginning to recognize your problem, for I have had some small experience with it." Once I could make that identification, my reluctance was overcome. With my second reluctance, I deliberately searched for parallels in my own life to help me identify with the problem.

III. THE SECOND RELUCTANCE

I was also reluctant to admit the importance of "modalities of learning." I still have problems with the notion. Apparently, when a student has trouble getting something through sight or hearing, then a teacher should invoke "other modalities." I am still not convinced that the term is getting at the problem, but upon reflection, I admitted having experienced learning in the "other modalities" and that I had, indeed, been invoking them, but not necessarily in my regular classes.

When I worked for an agency in Washington, D.C., I was put in charge of a row of large files with combination locks. Both I and my superiors had the combinations to the locks, but I, the inferior, had to open them every morning of every working day. I could not retain an oral or a visual image of the combinations, but what my eyes and my ears could not recall, my fingers would. The muscles in the fingers, the wrist, even the arm, remembered the moves needed. All I had to do was relax and let my fingers do the remembering.

If I were a pianist like my older daughter or a dancer like my younger, I could come up with a more elegant personal experience of the "other modalities," for the performing arts are proof that intelligence does not reside solely in the brain. It permeates the body. It flows into the fingertips. That is why my daughter can play Bach so beautifully. Without the intelligent muscles of musicians no one would ever hear the aural in-

telligence of Bach. Muscle memory and muscle sense learn and remember things that otherwise would never be learned.

For some of my students, for some of my material, only the intelligence of their muscles, the kinesthetic modality, seems to work. No amount of reading or listening to my explanation works as well as a hands-on, "walk-through" of the material. There must be something for their muscles to do before their brains will receive.

Before I reluctantly acknowledged the need for "other modalities," I would hand out the following editing guide, explain it a bit and that was that.

The Third Step

When you have the parts under control and the connections among the topics straightened out, you are finished organizing. The next step is to determine the sequence of the parts. This step is called "plotting," and the sequence itself is called "the plot."

The best help you can have for plotting is a well-formed master summary. The way that it sequences the topics is the way the plot should go. *The summary should reveal the plot.*

Plotting

Does the plot implied by the master summary line up with the strands of coherence?

____not applicable, ____yes____no

If not applicable (because your material has no intrinsic strands of coherence), then continue.

If yes, continue.

If no, then prepare to revise either the summary or the plot. Or both.

Which gets the stranding wrong?
____the summary? ____the draft?
____both?

If it is just the summary, revise it to match the draft. If it is the draft, rearrange its parts to match the summary. If it is both, revise the summary first; then rearrange the draft to match.

****

Readers expect both the summary and the plot to flow from information that is most familiar to them to that which is most unfamiliar. The natural flow of information is from old to new.

Does your master summary and your present plot follow the flow from familiar and old to unfamiliar and new?

____yes ____no

If yes, continue.

If no, rewrite the summary to make the flow clear. Then rearrange the parts to match that flow.

The directions seemed easy to me. For example, "Then rearrange the parts to match the flow." To do that the students had to take out scissors and cut up the draft properly, then tape up the pieces in the new arrangement. Some students simply couldn't or wouldn't do it. Some of them came for help to my office. I would sit them down in front of my "plot board" and go through the steps with them, give them my scissors, have them do the cutting, the arraying, and the final taping. Then they got it. I know because they could then do it to their own material.

I still offer individual help but less so, for I have put that kind of "walk-through" into my regular classes. (As any good elementary teacher would have, with a snort, told me to do.) The students bring their scissors, their stapler or tape, the backing sheets and walk through rearranging the parts of a sample student draft. Those who need to use their hands to feed their brains get that help right in class. And the demand for individual attention is reduced. I found out that another kind of student is also helped.

The walk-through becomes a breakthrough for the students whose only learning disability is their refusal to try something unfamiliar. "But, Mr. Herum, I've never done this before" is actually offered as a reason for not doing something. I explain that learning is often uncomfortable, and that feelings of strangeness, awkwardness, and even embarrassment are all symptoms of a creature learning. I also reassure them that things new to them may be old to much of the rest of the word. The walk-through becomes a kind of "walkabout," an initiation that makes the ways of the larger world familiar to them. In this instance, they become acquainted with the editorial shears, something familiar to a working writer; but something many have never seen in action.

Any of these tactics could be dismissed as "gimmicks," but if they are, then so are eye glasses "gimmicks." One must be careful about dismissing as a "gimmick" something one does not need...yet. I was always rather proud of my eyesight. I did very well on the shooting range with my trusty carbine...when I was twenty-two. Now, well, now if I want to read the morning paper, I need my glasses.

Good teaching tactics are not "gimmicks." Any single one of these helps may seem a small thing, but when somebody's wheels are spinning, all that is needed sometimes to get going is a small, neighborly shove.

I had a learning disabled student sitting in on my fall composition class. She was to watch, listen, and later in the day offer me a critique. At one of the critiques, she leaned towards me and in a voice as earnest as death, said, "Never underestimate the importance of the physical." She went on to list things like my voice lowering at times too much, my handwriting on the board at times too small, the way I didn't check at times to see if the sunlight had wiped the board clean for those on my left. All little things, only a minor inconvenience for most students, but a major difficulty for others. As a teacher it is my job to identify the difficulties my discipline entails, and show students how to overcome them. Whatever the obstacles the material might present, it is not my job to add to them physical difficulties; nor should I be one.

IV. THE THIRD RELUCTANCE

My last example is nothing small. I am now somewhat ashamed to admit that I was a reluctant convert to the detailed syllabus. I don't believe I avoided it because I feared a loss of spontaneity (it took only a

moment to realize that any flight of spontaneity would be heightened by a detailed itinerary, not inhibited); nor was it fear of becoming brittle and inflexible (I knew enough about planning to know that it is the basis for flexible response.) It was more a matter of habit carried over from the early days of teaching and parenting, the days when I didn't really know what the hell I was doing. It doesn't take a prudent parent long to figure out that the fewer explicit promises you make to a child, the less chance of dashed hopes. And with children and other students Murphy's law operates: Things will go wrong. If the first step of a sequence of steps goes haywire, then you may have to discard the entire sequence. How disappointing for a child! How humiliating for the beginning teacher! My rule for survival both as parent and teacher, then, was "Don't promise too much too soon." A detailed syllabus promised too much, too explicitly, too early. It wouldn't let you escape unnoticed from a disastrous misjudgement in sequencing.

But I am no longer a beginning parent or a beginning teacher. I can discard the habits of a beginner, especially those habits that burden others needlessly. There is no reason not to prepare a detailed itinerary for a trip I have taken with students many times. There will still be surprises, all the more cherished because they occur on familiar ground.

For students with learning disabilities, the detailed syllabus is a great help. Their disability makes heavy demands on their time; to meet course requirements, these students must learn to plan. They can't plan unless they know well in advance what to expect. For many of them, planning their time is made even more difficult because they have trouble getting sequences straight, all the more reason for a teacher to offer a stable sequence and to remind students regularly of where they are.

The disabled are not the only ones who need to learn to plan their time. Some few come to my writing classes prepared to plan and disciplined to do so. Most don't. Even many of the talented try to slog through a course. They discover they are inundated at the end of the quarter with no good excuse for being up the creek when the highway was clearly marked. A detailed syllabus rewards the planners.

My detailed syllabus actually leaves out certain key words because it serves several functions: as a syllabus it promises that certain material will be covered at a certain time and it specifies what jobs the student must perform and when; however, it also functions as a class log. There is room on the sheets for students to enter "key words" from the day's lecture, demonstration, or exercise. I demand that it be used that way to teach one aspect of note-taking. Those who already know how to use key words would do something like that anyway; those who don't have to start learning how.

I review the log in class with students at least twice a quarter: just before midterm and just before the last week. The space left blank for the key words also makes it easier for me to make changes in the agenda, and so it placates any lingering remnants of reluctance about the use of

such a detailed instrument. A copy of my current "Course Syllabus and Class Log" has been added as Appendix B to this booklet. The first two pages of the log have been filled out by a student.

V. RETROSPECT, WITH A DASH OF POLEMIC

The HELDS project invited me and the other participating professors to examine our teaching habits and our professorial attitudes to see which of them helped and which didn't. It then asked us to act on what we learned.

What did I learn? Well, I relearned that anger and suspicion make it difficult to accept evidence that contradicts one's own strongly held beliefs, but with the help of HELDS, my suspicion subsided. When my first reluctance ebbed away, it tugged at the others to leave as well, which they did, finally, as I began to accept the validity of the problems facing the learning disabled.

Though I accepted the validity of their problems, nothing that I did to change my compostion course was done solely for them. What happened was nothing so dramatic, nothing so uneconomic (after all, there are only a few such students; radical change to accommodate uniquely just that small fraction of the students would not be prudent).

I and the other participating professors had been selected because we were considered good teachers, already sympathetic to students. We were not expected to change dramatically, but we were expected to become more aware of our special teaching strengths. We were, by and large, oddly unaware of them. We really didn't know for sure what it was we did that seemed to be the most help. By discovering together our separate strengths, we were expected to learn from one another, and so add strength to strength. Most of all, we were expected to understand the problems facing the learning disabled and by addressing ourselves to those problems make concern about them academically respectable. We could give evidence that students with learning disabilities were neither incompetents nor frauds and that with some adaptations on our part, they could succeed in most, if not all, of the courses on campus.

In his useful handbook, Lynn Smith described both what professors need to do and what makes them reluctant to do it:

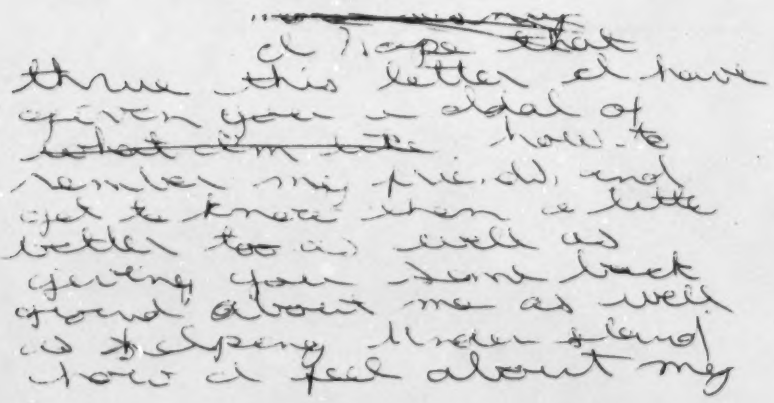
> Because the *expectation* is that a college student will absorb information, communicate it and be evaluated through the printed page, the learning disabled student will need assistance and support from professors in finding innovative ways of receiving and transmitting information and in being evaluated. Because a learning disability is "hidden," the instructor may have understandable doubts about the validity of these alternative approaches. However, the fact remains

that the student's capacity for learning is intact. It is only the means by which the information is processed that is different. (Smith, p. 12)

That first reluctance of mine was not mine alone. It was and is a common attitude. It is the major obstacle facing these students. It took a special project to make a faculty aware because the validity of the claims about learning disabilities was widely suspect.

I, and many of the others in the project, had always been willing to adapt our courses to the legitimate demands of students. Once we recognized that the demands of the learning disabled were legitimate, too, then the consideration that we had extended to others could be extended to them as well.

For example, because of HELDS, I am now more apt to recognize the following sample of in-class drafting *not* as a symptom of incompetence, but rather as a symptom of an unfortunate, but manageable, learning disability:



Before HELDS, I might easily have judged the author of such writing unfairly, and I would not have told the student of available alternatives and support services that others have used successfully. In effect I would have denied the LD student something regularly offered to others. Now I have learned to tell all my classes about available alternatives and services. I have also learned to get samples of in-class drafting early in the quarter. I want to try to spot those who need the available help and make sure they are aware of their need.

Apparently one of my teaching strengths that helps these students (and others) is my willingness to work out alternate ways to achieve course goals. For example,

I point to the entire array of tools available to contemporary literacy: old-fashioned editorial shears as well as dictating equipment, transcription services, and word-processing equipment with its wonderful "cut-and paste" capabilities. (This passage is being composed on a "mag-card machine," obsolete by current standards of word processing, but much beloved by me for the beauty of its print.) I encourage students to use whatever tools will help.

I see no reason to limit the student to tools in vogue in 1888. I see no reason to limit them to any one set of tools or any one set of procedures — as long as they get the writing job done and do it to standard specifications.

Similarly, I am willing to work out alternate time schedules, too. So far not a one of the officially designated learning disabled students has asked for time beyond the quarter's deadline to finish a major writing assignment. However, if one did, I would be prepared to negotiate for a grade of "Incomplete" and work out a firm schedule with the student. It is an accommodation I have made before with students stricken in mid-term with a disabling disease. If I am willing to accommodate the temporarily disabled, I see no reason not to extend that grace to those whose disability may be permanent.

I am willing to work out alternatives because I am passionately concerned about the current level of literacy. The wave of semi-literacy that has been building up for twenty years has yet to crest. The general level of literacy will go lower and lower, unless the standards of high literacy are demanded and taught. Merely demanding won't do it. Demanding without teaching will just produce more failures, needlessly. Every needless failure lowers one more notch the general level of literacy. Students who have been untaught have been cheated. They have been cheated again, if their lack of literacy goes unacknowleged as they are passed from one level of our schools to the next. These twice-cheated students swell the wave of semi-literates now hitting our campuses. I don't want to see them cheated yet again once they are here.

If my teaching tactics can show learning disabled students (and others) how to achieve a literate composition, then I have helped maintain those standards of literacy that so concern me. If, on the other hand, I turn my back on LD students (or any other group) because they are difficult and I am reluctant, who is helped? Not the students who are thereby neglected once again; not I, for I have missed a chance to improve my teaching (and learning to teach well *is* a major part of my job as a professor); and certainly not the general public, whose taxes support me and who already has reasons to suspect that schools at all levels are neither teaching well nor teaching enough.

Many English professors have a dread vision: we see English with its tradition of a thousand years of literacy being overwhelmed by new waves of uncivility. One of the deep pleasures of the HELDS project was discovering how many of my colleagues were excellent, concerned teachers. The sessions I valued most were those where we talked together and discovered our mutual commitment to good teaching. I learned from their strengths; perhaps they learned something from mine. Their greatest lesson to me, however, was to change my visions of dread to visions of hope. Their care, their concern, their commitment gave me hope that standards of civil discourse will prevail, if only enough teachers at all levels teach as hard and as well.

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APPENDIX A

Criterion and Behavioral Checklist for Adults with Specific Learning Disabilities

1. Short attention span.

2. Restlessness.

3. Distractability. (The student seems especially sensitive to sounds or visual stimuli and has difficulty ignoring them while studying.)

4. Poor motor coordination. (This may be seen as clumsiness.)

5. Impulsivity. (Responding without thinking.)

6. Perseveration. (The student tends to do or say things over and over. Mechanism that says "finished" does not work well.)

7. Handwriting is poor. (Letters will not be well formed, spacing between words and letters will be inconsistent, writing will have an extreme up or down slant on unlined page.)

8. Spelling is consistently inconsistent.

9. Inaccurate copying. (The student has difficulty copying things from the chalkboard and from textbooks; for instance, math problems may be off by one or two numbers that have been copied incorrectly or out of sequence.)

10. Can express self well orally but fails badly when doing so in writing. In a few cases the reverse is true.

11. Frequently misunderstands what someone is saying. (For instance, a student may say, "What?", and then may or may not answer appropriately before someone has a chance to repeat what was said previously.)

12. Marked discrepancy between what student is able to understand when listening or reading.

13. Has trouble with variant word meanings and figurative language.

14. Has problems structuring (organizing) time -- The person is frequently late to class and appointments; seems to have no "sense of how long a "few minutes" is opposed to an hour; has trouble pacing

self during tests.

15. Has problems structuring (organizing) space -- The student may have difficulty concentrating on work when in a large, open area -- even when it's quiet; may over or under-reach when trying to put something on a shelf (depth perception).

16. Has difficulty spacing an assignment on a page, e.g., math problems are crowded together.

17. Thoughts -- ideas wander and/or are incomplete in spoken and written language. Student may also have difficulty sequencing ideas.

18. Sounds -- A student's hearing acuity may be excellent, but when his brain processes the sounds used in words, the sequence of sounds may be out of order: e.g., the student hears "aminal" instead of "animal" and may say and/or write the "aminal."

19. Visual selectively; May have 20/20 vision but when brain processes visual information, e.g., pictures, graphs, words, numbers, student may be unable to focus visual attention selectively - in other words, everything from a flyspeck to a key word in a title has equal claim on attention.

20. Word retrieval problems -- the student has difficulty recalling words that have been learned.

21. Misunderstands non-verbal information, such as facial expressions or gestures.

22. Very slow worker -- but may be extremely accurate.

23. Very fast worker -- but makes many errors and tends to leave out items.

24. Visual images -- Has 20/20 vision but may see things out of sequence, e.g., "frist" for "first," "961" for "691." Or, a student may see words or letters as if they are turned around or upside down: e.g., "cug" for "cup," or "dub" for "bud," or "9" for "L" for "7," etc.

25. Makes literal interpretations. You will have to have them give you feedback on verbal directions, etc.

26. Judges books by their thickness because of frustration when learning to read.

27. Has mixed dominance: e.g., student may be right handed and left eyed.

28. Moodiness -- Quick tempered, frustration.

29. Cannot look people in the eyes and feels uncomfortable when talking to others.

30. Has trouble answering yes or no to questions.

Students with specific learning disabilities which affect their performance in math generally fall into two groups:

1. Those students whose language processing (input and output) and/or reading abilities are impaired. These students will have great difficulty doing word problems; however, if the problems are read to them, they will be able to do them.

2. Those students whose abilities necessary to do quantitative thinking are impaired. These students often have one or more problems such as the following:

A. Difficulty in visual-spatial organization and in integrating nonverbal material. For example, a student with this kind of problem will have trouble estimating distances, distinguishing differences in amounts, sizes, shapes, and lengths. Student may also have trouble looking at groups of objects and telling what contains the greater amount. This student frequently has trouble organizing and sequencing material meaningfully on a page.

B. Difficulty in integrating kinesthetic processes. For example, a student will be inaccurate in copying problems from a textbook or chalkboard onto a piece of paper. The numbers may be out of sequence or the wrong numbers (e.g., copying "6" for "5"). Problems may be out of alignment on the paper. Graph paper is a must for them.

C. Difficulty in visually processing information. Numbers will be misperceived: "6" and "9," "3" and "8" and "9" are often confused. The student may also have trouble revisualizing. i.e., calling up the visual memory of what a number looks like or how a problem should be laid out on a page.

D. Poor sense of time and direction. Usually, students in the second group have the auditory and/or kinesethic as their strongest learning channels. They need to use manipulative materials accompanied by oral explanations from the instructor. They often need to have many experiences with concrete materials before they can move on successfully to the abstract and symbolic level of numbers.

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APPENDIX B

Syllabus and Class Log for English 101
John Herum
Office: L&L 408-C, Phone: 963-3402, Office Hours: 11:00 - 12:00 daily or by appt.

Topics	Handouts and Assignments
January 6, 1982	
Course Requirements Portfolio file, turned in -- everything from the quarter Min of 8 hr/wk outside class	Handouts: 043, 044, 045, 046, 053 (syllabus) Buy a red, one-third cut, file folder. Select a subject area and three possible "starter texts." Read Herum & Cummings, Chapts. 1 & 3. Read Crews, pp. 360-363.
January 8, 1982	
In-class Drafting o-Backup for prospectus predraft, zero draft + rough draft; log, name "babble" assignment	Handouts: 424 (log sheet) Do the "Name Game" in-class. Start a personal time log this noon. Continue it through a.m. 1-15-82. (See 1-18 below.) Write a letter of introduction. (Due 1-13-82.) 15
January 11, 1982	
The Writing Process: terms defined Predrafting, drafting, editing, preparing final copy Drafting: zero draft, rough draft, first draft	Handouts: 009 (editing) Read Crews, pp. 54-65. More on the requirements for the letter.
January 13, 1982 Bring in 3 starter texts	
Choosing A Book For The Quarter Being able to compare choices Backup and proof of work important o-Backup for prospectus	Handouts: 076, 77 (dream starter text). Read Herum & Cummings, Chapt. 2. Read Crews, Chapt. 11, reread pp. 360-363. Photocopy title page, table of contents, index of selected texts. (Due 1-15-82.) Photocopy book reviews of finalist. Draft a 300-word statement on the suitability of your final choice. (Due 1-18-82.) all 5 criteria
January 15, 1982	
Sources and Resources sales pitch, suitability, reliability o-backup for prospectus	Handouts: ___ Identify local experts, address and phone. Interview one expert.** Draft a 300-word statement on the reliability of your chosen text. (Due 1-18-82.) reviews interviews
January 18, 1982	
Scheduling Your Time tactics, techniques of thought forced choice, patterns o-backup for prospectus	Handouts: In-class predrafting and drafting; analyzing your personal time log (so please remember to bring it) and drafting a 300-word statement about your "prime time" and the work for this course. (Due today.) Wed 1/20/82

Topics	Handouts and Assignments
January 20, 1982	
Preview of the Editing Phase Parts analysis, edit in pencil	Handouts: _____. Editing in class.
January 22, 1982	
continued Parts, determining what needs to be said in each part, completeness, sequence/use of repetition, images	Handouts: _____. Draft, edit, and put into final copy a "prospectus." (Due 2-1-82.) (Draft) Reread description of "prospectus" in Herum & Cummings.
January 25, 1982	
Predrafting: Note-taking, Especially When Studying Books and Articles (will use handouts for this) will continue in editing process Time allotment/Introduce subject well, establish trust	Handouts: 099, 035, 036. Use the marks taught on the in-class sample and on all your drafts and back-up. Parts list of prospectus and editing guide.
January 27, 1982	
Predrafting: Using Other Voices Also, note-taking/Get into habit, Space!, Key words; topic analysis, skim when reading, mark text, paraphrase, dialogue.	Handouts: 103, 104, 100, 101, 102. Start a quote file. Practice using a quote to support a statement.
January 29, 1982	
Drafting: Monologue versus Dialogue Dialogue--no narrator	Handouts: _____. Read Herum & Cummings, Chapt. 6. Draft a short dialogue (500 words). **
February 1, 1982	
Return to Predrafting: Visualizing Backup for prospectus Wall charts, subject charts	Handouts: _____. Try charting techniques to analyze your subject. In-class, do a subject chart on writing goals. In-class, draft 300 words on course goals. Draft of prospectus due 2/1/82.

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Topics	Handouts and Assignments
February 3, 1982	
Predrafting: The Importance of Listing	Handouts:
February 5, 1982	
Predrafting: Arraying and Mapping	Handouts: Read Herum & Cummings, Chapt. 5.
February 8, 1982	
Predrafting: Drawing Comparisons	Handouts: Read Herum & Cummings, Chapt. 7. Reminder: The prospectus is due today!
February 10, 1982	
Editing: Basic Stoff and Basic Schemes	Handouts: Read Crews, "Essay Modes," pp. 9 ff.. Read Herum & Cummings, Chapts 8 & 9.
February 17, 1982	
Editing: Keeping First Things First	Handouts: Read Herum & Cummings, Chapts. 10, 11, 12.
February 19, 1982	
continued	Handouts: In-class editing.

Topics	Handouts and Assignments
	February 22, 1982
continued	Handouts: _____.
_____	In-class editing.
_____	
_____	
	February 24, 1982
Editing: Clarity and the Sinuous Flow	Handouts: _____.
_____	Edit sample draft; apply to your drafts.
_____	
_____	
	February 26, 1982
Editing: Clarity and Sentence Structure	Handouts: _____.
_____	Edit sample draft, apply to your drafts.
_____	
_____	
	March 1, 1982
Editing: The Social Meaning of Subordination	Handouts: _____.
	Draft due?
_____	Apply the lesson to a set of summary sentences.
_____	
_____	
	March 3, 1982
Editing: Clarity versus Conciseness	Handouts: _____.
_____	Describe the relationship between reader and the topic, and then between reader and writer.
_____	
_____	Draft due?
	March 5, 1982
Editing: Cohesion	Handouts: _____.
_____	Draft due?
_____	
_____	

Topics	Handouts and Assignments
March 8, 1982	
Editing Under Pressure: The SEG	Handouts: _____.
_____	Draft due?
_____	Final copy due: _____
_____	_____.
March 10, 1982	
The Portfolio File and Its Preface	Handouts: _____.
_____	Portfolio file and preface due March 17, 1982.
_____	Draft due?
_____	
March 12, 1982	
Preparing Final Copy: Word Processing	Handouts: _____.
_____	Marking sample copy.
_____	Draft due?
_____	
March 15, 1982	
Preparing Final Copy: Proofreading	Handouts: _____.
_____	Draft or final copy due?
_____	
_____	
1:00-3:00, March 17, 1982	
Evaluation of the Course	Handouts: The Last Array
_____	An in-class essay of evaluation.
_____	Portfolio file and its preface due today.
_____	

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